

19. NIC M 89-10003, October 1989, Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals

National Intelligence Council

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Memorandum

**Status of Soviet
Unilateral Withdrawals**

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Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals (U)

Information available as of 1 September 1989 was used in the preparation of this Memorandum, which was prepared by the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces. The Memorandum was coordinated with representatives of the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency; coordination was chaired by the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces.

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Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals~~for~~

- Soviet reductions in Eastern Europe are proceeding in a manner consistent with Gorbachev's commitment; they will result in a significant reduction in the combat capability of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe.
- Current Soviet activities comprise four simultaneous processes: withdrawal, reduction, restructuring, and modernization.
- In Eastern Europe the Soviets, at roughly halfway through the period, have withdrawn about 50 percent of the equipment and units promised. Percentages are much lower for reductions in the overall Atlantic-to-the-Urals zone and for east of the Urals.
- Soviet restructuring and modernization activities will produce a smaller, more versatile, standing force optimized for defense, but still capable of smaller scale offensive operations.

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Discussion

This paper presents the latest assessment of the ongoing unilateral Soviet withdrawal of forces from Eastern Europe and reductions in the so-called Atlantic-to-the-Urals (ATTU) zone. It provides the latest figures of forces withdrawn and reduced, the current understanding of the restructuring of the forces remaining, and the best estimates of the factors affecting the combat capabilities and potential missions of those residual forces.

We have reached two bottom-line judgments. First, we believe that the Soviet withdrawal is real and that it will result in a reduction in the combat capability of the remaining Soviet forces in Eastern Europe; second, all of the changes we are seeing, and those we anticipate, are consistent with our understanding of General Secretary Gorbachev's policy objectives—reducing Western perceptions of the Warsaw Pact threat, inducing a relaxation in NATO's defense efforts, achieving an agreement on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), and lowering the defense economic burden on the USSR.

Although "withdrawal" or "reduction" are the terms generally associated with the current Soviet activity, there are actually four processes occurring simultaneously: first, a *withdrawal* of Soviet units and equipment from the traditional "forward areas" in Eastern Europe; second, a *reduction* in the overall Soviet force posture, with a particular emphasis on those areas facing NATO; third, a *restructuring* of the remaining forces intended to bring their capabilities into line with anticipated missions, objectives, and conditions; and, fourth, a continuation of programmatic *modernization* intended to raise the combat effectiveness of Soviet forces. All of this activity is totally unilateral. The Soviets are under no formal obligation to carry through and are free to adjust the process as they proceed. Nevertheless, Gorbachev has a strong interest in demonstrating that he is fulfilling his promises.

In assessing what is going on, the best place to start is with the dramatic 7 December 1988 speech at the UN by Gorbachev. He made the following key statements of Soviet intentions, that over the next two years the Soviets would:

- *Reduce the overall size of their armed forces by 500,000 personnel*
- *Reduce the size of their forces in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary by 50,000 persons and 5,000 tanks. This was later increased to 5,300 tanks with the inclusion of reductions in Soviet forces in Poland.*
- *Reduce 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery systems, and 800 combat aircraft from Eastern Europe and the Western USSR (the ATTU zone)*
- *Withdraw and disband six tank divisions from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary*
- *Withdraw assault landing formations and units and assault river crossing forces.*
- *Restructure the remaining forces to present an "unambiguously defensive" posture*

He made additional promises concerning Asia.

Gorbachev's speech was met with many questions and much skepticism in the West. Between late December and late February, official Soviet spokesmen asserted that the six Soviet divisions to be withdrawn from Eastern Europe would be withdrawn in their entirety, that all of their combat equipment would be destroyed, and that the other tanks removed from Eastern Europe would be destroyed or converted.

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As the withdrawals and restructuring have progressed, it has become increasingly clear that, although the Soviets are generally moving toward meeting Gorbachev's initial commitments, they are not being implemented in the manner described by some subsequent spokesmen. The tank regiments, other units, and all of the tanks of the three divisions scheduled for removal in 1989 have been withdrawn, along with many tanks from other divisions. Other units—and almost all of the artillery and armored troop carriers—however—are being used in the restructuring of the remaining divisions, each of which is losing two battalions of tanks as one tank regiment is converted to a motorized rifle regiment. Moreover, the tanks being removed from Eastern Europe are not being destroyed.

The Soviets are beginning to acknowledge deviations from some of their statements, but they have still not been entirely forthright about some of the consequences, notably:

- That the artillery in the remaining divisions is being increased by the addition of one artillery battalion in tank divisions and that artillery battalions in divisions are being expanded from 18 to 24 guns.
- That the restructuring of the remaining divisions may eventually require the introduction of some 2,000 additional armored troop carriers.

Most of what the Soviets are doing makes military sense. Indeed, it is generally what we would have expected until the Soviets began making additional statements. Despite these deviations, the overall result will still be a very significant reduction in the offensive combat power of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe.

How close have the Soviets come to meeting Gorbachev's 7 December promises as we approach the midway point? Tables 1-3 illustrate our answer. Table 1 provides the scorecard for forces withdrawn from Eastern Europe. Column one gives the reportable items; column two, the total number of those items in that area as of 1 January 1989; column three, the specific reductions announced for each of the items; column four, the reductions the Soviets have announced as of 1 August 1989; column five, our assessment of reductions as of 1 September 1989; and, finally, column six provides the percentage that our

assessment represents of the total announced reduction. At halfway through the period, the percentages are in the neighborhood of 50 percent complete. We believe that up to 2,800 tanks; 180 combat aircraft; four air assault units; and two assault crossing units have been withdrawn; and three tank divisions have been removed from the force structure. No percentage is offered for artillery because no specific withdrawal of artillery from the forward area was promised in Gorbachev's speech.

Turning to table 2, we see a similar picture, although the percentages are somewhat reduced. For example, we have not detected that the Soviets have reduced the total number of tanks in the ATTU zone to the same degree that they have withdrawn the promised number of tanks from Eastern Europe. Finally, table 3 provides a picture of the status of the reductions from east of the Urals. Overall, the Soviets, within the limits of our ability to observe and assess, seem to be proceeding with the unilateral withdrawals as outlined by Gorbachev.

Questions have arisen concerning the spirit and letter of their promise. Are they doing what they promised? Is the force size really changing? Even if it is, are the residual Soviet forces more capable? In short, is there less here than meets the eye?

Let us look at the tank issue first. Following Gorbachev's 7 December speech, statements by Soviet officials indicated that most or all of the 5,300 tanks to be withdrawn from Eastern Europe would be destroyed and that most of the 4,700 others to be reduced in the western USSR would be converted to civilian use. Some subsequent statements have indicated that tanks would also be placed in storage or used to upgrade units. The inconsistency and ambiguity of these statements make it difficult to determine how many tanks the Soviets now intend to dismantle or destroy, but virtually all of them will be older models from within the USSR and not the relatively more modern tanks being withdrawn from Eastern Europe. Moreover, some evidence indicates that Moscow is planning to store a significant number of the tanks removed from units in the ATTU zone east of

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Table 1
Soviet Forces Withdrawn From Eastern Europe to the USSR *

Total in Units	Announced Withdrawals to be completed by 1 January 1989	Withdrawals Claimed "completed as of 1 August 1989"	Assessed Withdrawals (as of 1 September 1989)	Percent of Announced Withdrawals Completed
Tanks	3	3	3	50
Artillery	11,600	5,300	2,700 to 3,100 (1,988 from East Germany)	2,700 to 2,800 (2,000 from East Germany)
Aircraft	1,000	Unspecified	690 to 700 (69 from East Germany)	36%
Combat vehicles	1,600	260 to 321	120 to 162*	180
Air assault units	8	4	4†	50
Assault crossings	7	7	2‡	29
Manpower	600,000	50,000	31,800* (11,400 from East Germany)	

* This table includes forces the Soviets are removing from Eastern Europe. It does not include the disposition of these forces in the Soviet Union.

† Aircraft totals are as of 1 January 1988.

‡ Major elements of the 25th Tank Division (TD) and 32nd Guards Tank Division (GTD)—including all tanks and the air defense regiment, reconnaissance battalion, and multiple rocket launcher battalion from each division—have departed from East Germany. Both divisions transferred their motorized rifle regiments to another division, but a tank regiment from these divisions was removed in their place. Most of the artillery and virtually all motorized rifle elements from the 25th TD and 32nd GTD probably have been retained in East Germany to facilitate the restructuring of remaining Ground Forces units.

Major elements—and perhaps all—of the 13th Guards Tank Division have departed from their garrisons in Hungary. Only tanks from the division, however, have been identified at bases in the USSR.

§ Some Soviet spokesmen have indicated that from 2,700 to 3,100 tanks are being or have been withdrawn from abroad. In each instance, their statements may include tanks removed from Eastern Europe and Mongolia. Most recently another Soviet spokesman stated that some 2,700 tanks had departed from Eastern Europe.

¶ Tanks from as many as five maneuver regiments and a tank training regiment may have departed from Hungary.

** This total is for all Soviet artillery 100 mm and above, including mortars, multiple rocket launchers, and antitank guns.

§ Soviet spokesmen have stated that from 690 to 700 "guns" or artillery pieces have been withdrawn from abroad. Their statements either specifically or probably include artillery removed from Eastern Europe and Mongolia.

¶ Because of force restructuring requirements, most—perhaps all—self-propelled artillery pieces probably remain in Eastern Europe; some 36 BM-21 multiple rocket launchers were observed on railcars and apparently departed from East Germany.

** This total excludes helicopters and AWACS.

† Soviet spokesmen have stated that from 260 to 321 combat aircraft will be removed from Eastern Europe.

* Soviet spokesmen have stated that from 120 to 162 combat aircraft have been withdrawn from abroad. Their statements either specifically or probably include aircraft removed from Eastern Europe and Mongolia.

† In addition to the four air assault battalions apparently removed from Eastern Europe, the air assault brigade at Cottbus in East Germany is in the process of withdrawing and probably has been eliminated from the structure of the Western Group of Forces.

‡ Some assets from withdrawn assault crossing battalions apparently have been reassigned to units remaining in East Germany.

* Soviet spokesmen have stated that 31,800 servicemen have been withdrawn from abroad. Their statements probably include personnel removed from Eastern Europe and Mongolia. One spokesman said that 11,400 men had departed from East Germany.

the Urals. There is also evidence that the Soviets will upgrade divisions in the USSR, including those in the ATTU zone, with more modern tanks withdrawn from Eastern Europe.

In general, we believe that tanks withdrawn from Eastern Europe are replacing older tanks that had been in cadre units or storage in the USSR. To the

best of our knowledge, the Soviets are taking the opportunity created by this withdrawal to retain their most modern equipment in their residual forces. Thus, in East Germany, the residual force will be entirely equipped with T-80s. The withdrawn T-64s replace T-10s, T-55s, T-54s, and the oldest T-64s that had

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Table 2
Soviet Force Reductions in the Atlantic-to-the-Urals Zone

	Total in the Force (as of 1 January 1989 ^b)	Announced Reduc- tions (to be imple- mented by 1 January 1991)	Assessed Reductions (as of) September, 1989 ^c	Percent of Announced Reduc- tions Completed
Ground Forces divisions	144	Up to 50 ^d percent	20 ^d	28
Tanks	44,000	10,000	1,600 ^e	16
Artillery	52,500 ^f	8,500	1,400 ^a	16
Combat aircraft	11,500 ^g	800	530 ^h	66
Manpower	2,424,000 ⁱ	240,000		

^a This table includes equipment apparently removed from the force but most of which remains unaccounted for

^b Aircraft totals are as of 1 January 1988

^c Soviet spokesmen have stated that as many as half of Soviet Ground Forces divisions will be eliminated

^d This total includes those divisions that have physically disbanded or deactivated to mobilization bases (2nd TO&E divisions). An additional six divisions apparently are in the process of disbanding or deactivating

^e Some 2,700 to 2,800 tanks have been withdrawn from Eastern Europe (see Table 1, footnote f). Most of these are T-64s, which have been accounted for in units or bases in the USSR. Some 1,600 additional tanks—mostly T-10s and T-54/55s—were removed from army corps or divisions deactivating or disbanding in the western Soviet Union. Most of these tanks remain unaccounted for

^f This total includes antitank guns in units and artillery pieces stored in depots

^g This total excludes helicopters, sea-based naval air, heavy bombers, tankers, and AWACS

^h These aircraft have been removed from active units. A senior Soviet officer has indicated that some of these aircraft will be scrapped, some used for training or as flying targets, and some mothballed. To date, no scrapping has been confirmed

ⁱ This total includes 1,309,000 in the Ground Forces; 358,000 in the Air Defense Forces; 263,000 in the Air Forces; 280,000 in the Navy; and 214,000 in the Strategic Rocket Forces. It does not include construction and railroad troops or civil defense and internal security forces

been held for many years in cadre units or in long-term depot storage in the interior of the Soviet Union and east of the Urals.



What does this mean for Soviet capabilities? There has been no net increase in the number of T-72 and T-80 tanks in the forward area, and only modest increases are anticipated in the next few years. Therefore, the overall number of "most modern tanks" is not affected by the restructuring. In fact, the net number of tanks is being reduced by a significant number of older, yet fully capable T-64 tanks. Whereas the Soviets had 30 divisions with 120 maneuver

regiments before the withdrawal began, after the withdrawals are concluded they will have 24 divisions with 96 maneuver regiments

The manner in which the Soviets are carrying out their restructuring has, however, provoked serious questions that have not yet been answered. Clearly, although they have adhered to their promise to withdraw tanks and have removed three divisions from their force structure in Eastern Europe, equipment other than tanks from those units is being used to modernize and expand the equipment holdings of the remaining divisions

The inconsistency of certain features of the reduction and restructuring programs with some Soviet descriptions of these activities probably reflects adjustments made by the General Staff as the programs have

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Table 3
Soviet Force Reductions East of the Urals^a

	Total Deployed (As of 1 January 1989 ^b)	Announced Reduc- tions (To be imple- mented by 1 January 1991)	Assessed Reductions (As of 1 September 1989) ^c	Percent of Announced Reduc- tions Completed ^d
Ground Forces army corps	5		2 ^e	
Ground Forces divisions	75	15 divisions to "eastern" USSR ^f	5	13 to 33% for divi- sions in "eastern" USSR
Tanks	22,600		650	
Artillery	31,000 ^g		1,050	
Combat aircraft	3,930 ^h	15 regiments in "eastern" USSR ⁱ	115 aircraft ^j	
Manpower	967,000 ^k	260,000 ^k		

^a This table includes equipment apparently removed from the force but most of which remains unaccounted for

^b Aircraft totals are as of 1 January 1988

^c This total includes army corps headquarters that have been disbanded along with their nondivisional units. The divisions subordinate to the army corps have not all been disbanded. They are included in the figures for divisions. An additional army corps may be deactivating.

^d The Soviets have announced that 15 divisions will be eliminated in the "eastern" USSR. They have not specified however which areas and forces are included in the "eastern" USSR. Because Soviet spokesmen also have stated that as many as half of all Soviet Ground Forces divisions will be eliminated this would total 38 of the 75 divisions east of the Urals if the reduction is apportioned evenly.

^e The lower percentage excludes force reductions resulting from the Afghan withdrawal from the "eastern" USSR total; the higher figure includes these reductions.

^f This total includes an estimated 3,000 antitank guns and an undetermined number of artillery pieces with a caliber less than 100 mm stored in depots.

^g This total excludes helicopters, sea-based naval air heavy bombers, tankers, and AWACS.

^h This total includes the four regiments to be withdrawn from Mongolia. The Soviets have not specified which other regiments and how many additional aircraft are included.

ⁱ These aircraft have been removed from active units and remain unaccounted for. Because the Soviets have not specified the number of aircraft to be reduced we cannot determine what percentage 115 is of the total they plan to eliminate.

^j This total includes 491,000 in the Ground Forces; 157,000 in the Air Defense Forces; 94,000 in the Air Forces; 120,000 in the Navy; and 105,000 in the Strategic Rocket Forces. It does not include construction and railroad troops or civil defense and internal security forces.

^k This total includes 200,000 in the "eastern" USSR and 60,000 for the "southern" USSR, the latter probably being servicemen withdrawn from Afghanistan.

evolved. With the withdrawal program originally having been imposed from above, the General Staff probably has been given considerable flexibility in organizing remaining Soviet forces within the constraints imposed by "defensive" restructuring.

The character of the restructured residual force, therefore, is a major question. To discuss that force, however, requires some explanation of the overall Soviet motivation for the process. We believe that the ongoing unilateral reductions and restructuring are intended largely to foster a perception of reduced threat in the West and to maintain the momentum toward a CFE agreement that would allow Gorbachev

to reduce his forces further, reap potential economic benefits, and simultaneously reduce NATO force capability. We believe the Soviets remain committed to this end game and will not jeopardize it in an effort to obtain short-term military advantages that almost certainly would be quickly discovered by the West.

Gorbachev's economic agenda is an overriding consideration as we assess the scope of the Soviet's reductions and withdrawals. But what of the restructuring and modernization? As long ago as the middle-to-late 1970s, the Soviets recognized that the type of war that would probably be fought in Central Europe had

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Key Statements on Soviet Tank Reductions

22 December 1988

Major General Lebedev of the Soviet General Staff states that entire units with their materiel will be withdrawn from Eastern Europe. The units will be disbanded, and much of their equipment—including the latest model tanks—will be scrapped. Tank engines and auxiliary equipment will be turned over to the civilian economy. (Lebedev's statement was referring specifically to the tanks in the six divisions to be withdrawn; however, the context of his remarks indicate he may have been referring to all tank units removed from Eastern Europe.)

16 January 1989

Marshal Akhromeyev states that six tank divisions will be withdrawn from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. In addition, 3,300 tanks will be removed from Soviet motorized rifle divisions and other units in Eastern Europe. All 5,000 tanks to be withdrawn will be destroyed, and most of the tanks to be reduced west of the Urals will be dismantled.

17 January 1989

Marshal Kulikov asserts that "withdrawn forces" will not be stationed in the western military districts, although some would be stationed east of the Urals.

18 January 1989

General Secretary Gorbachev announces that half of the 10,000 tanks will be destroyed and half will be converted to civil use.

24 January 1989

Deputy Foreign Minister Karpov says that, of the 10,000 tanks to be reduced, half would be scrapped and the other half converted to civil or training use. The reduction involved 5,300 of the "most

modern" tanks and, of these, 3,300 would be from divisions remaining in Eastern Europe. The 2,000 tanks in the six tank divisions withdrawn from Eastern Europe would be "dismantled."

17 April 1989

Army General Snetkov, commander of Soviet forces in East Germany, states that the tanks removed from the GDR will be sent beyond the Urals; some will be "mothballed" and some modified for use in the national economy.

5 May 1989

Lieutenant General Fursin, Chief of Staff of Soviet forces in East Germany, announces that 1,000 tanks are already beyond the Urals, where they will be turned into bulldozers.

12 May 1989

Colonel General Chervov of the Soviet General Staff states that, of the 10,000 tanks to be eliminated, 5,000 will be destroyed and 5,000 will be used as towing vehicles or targets for firing practice.

19 May 1989

Soviet General Staff Chief Moiseyev says that Moscow reserves the option to retain rather than destroy equipment withdrawn from Eastern Europe.

23 May 1989

General Markelov, Chief of the General Staff Press Center, announces that older, wornout tanks will be smelted, and that newer tanks will be remodeled to serve as tractors for civilian purposes. He also states that a steel works at Chelyabinsk in the Urals is already smelting tanks.

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Key Statements on Soviet Tank Reductions (continued)

23 May 1989

Major General Shchepin, Chief of Staff of the Soviet Central Group of Forces, states that some of the T-72 tanks removed from Czechoslovakia will be scrapped or converted for civilian use at the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk in the North Caucasus Military District.

3 June 1989

General Staff spokesman Lieutenant General Petrov states that more than 2,750 tanks and artillery pieces have been dispatched to storage bases or for destruction

30 June 1989

Colonel General Omelichev, First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, states that more than 3,000 tanks have been withdrawn from Eastern Europe and Mongolia. He adds that units being withdrawn will be disbanded and some of their equipment will be destroyed, some transferred to storage bases, and some used in the national economy

3 July 1989

Defense Minister Yazov states that some tanks withdrawn from Eastern Europe are being used to upgrade units in the USSR, some are being mothballed, and "old" tanks made in the 1950s and 1960s are being destroyed

3 July 1989

Colonel General Krivosheyev of the General Staff states that the smelting of tanks has begun and that their engines and other components are being used in the economy; other tanks are being converted for civilian use. In 1989, 5,000 will be scrapped and 2,000 will be converted. Those being scrapped are heavy tanks like the T-10, which are unsuitable for civilian use

changed. Where once the use of nuclear weapons was expected, causing the Soviets to plan for rapid breakthrough and exploitation, the Soviets began to foresee a largely or wholly conventional war, where both sides' nuclear arsenals might be checked by parity. At the same time, they saw changes in NATO conventional forces that made those forces more and more capable of withstanding a conventional Soviet breakthrough operation. With the advent of densely deployed, relatively cheap, and highly effective antitank weapons systems, the Soviets began to talk about "gnawing" rather than "slicing" through NATO defenses. As Soviet General Staff attention turned toward the demands of a high-tech conventional battlefield, the Soviets recognized an increasing need to train for defensive operations. They also saw that their heavy tank forces were becoming more vulnerable, but only after the December initiative did they alter the planned expansion of their tank forces. In general terms, the current Soviet military response to NATO conventional capabilities is more infantry and artillery up front, backed by tank forces.

It is the reduction in the force and the change in the missions it is structured to perform that reflect Gorbachev's impact. Gorbachev has reasserted the Party's leading role in determining the sociopolitical content of Soviet military doctrine. The Communist Party and its leaders decide matters of national security, determine the potential opponents, the strategic likelihood of war, and the resources to be allocated to defense. Gorbachev's views of Soviet economic problems, and his assessment that near-to-midterm conflict with the West was unlikely, led him to conclude that reductions were a feasible method of contributing to his economic and political objectives.

19. (Continued)

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The Soviet leadership's reductions and restructuring programs will produce over the next few years the most significant changes in Soviet general purpose forces opposite NATO since Khrushchev's drastic force reductions of the late 1950s and early 1960s:

- As a consequence of decisions by the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies to cut their general purpose forces over the next two years, the offensive capabilities of Pact theater forces will decline through the first half of the 1990s.
- The announced withdrawals of Soviet forces from Central Europe, when completed, will significantly reduce Soviet prospects for attacking from a less than fully prepared force posture and lengthen considerably the amount of time required for the Pact to prepare and position forces for sustained offensive operations against NATO.
- Residual forces would be sufficient to mount a hastily constituted but still effective defense against NATO forces until reinforcements could be mobilized and moved forward.

As the Soviets move to an infantry-heavy force structure through restructuring, there may be a dramatic increase in the number of BMP infantry fighting vehicles. Although effective in combat operations, BMPs are not tanks, and we judge:

- Regardless of how the Soviets choose to restructure their forces, the loss of half the tanks previously stationed in Eastern Europe will significantly degrade Pact offensive capabilities
- Even a large addition of well-equipped infantry would not totally offset this loss of armored striking power

The Soviets, nevertheless, have no intention of disarming themselves, nor do they intend to maintain obsolete forces. Quite the contrary, Gorbachev's economic reforms, if successful, would prevent such outcomes. It is consistent with stated objectives, therefore, simultaneously to withdraw tanks, reduce the size of forces overall, and restructure and modernize residual forces using existing equipment to maximize their potential effectiveness against NATO.

Although we have a pretty good perspective on the general impact of these changes, there are still some important uncertainties. We do not know the actual shape that Soviet forces will take. Will Soviet objectives for their restructured forces change? They seem unlikely to have a capability to conduct breakthrough operations without mobilization—will that change? Will the residual forces be maintained at a higher level of readiness? On all these questions, opinions will abound, but until evidence or trends appear, conclusions are premature.

We conclude that the Soviet withdrawals and reduction observed to date are generally consistent with Gorbachev's initial statement. We also conclude that Soviet restructuring and modernization activity—consistent with emerging Soviet military doctrinal views of war in Europe and the nature and capability of NATO—will result in a smaller standing force optimized for defense, but still capable of smaller scale offensive operations. Such a force would require a massive and lengthy mobilization in order to perform deep strategic offensive operations against NATO.

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